

Article – How the EU wants to achieve a circular economy by 2050



Making crucial sectors circular

Circularity and sustainability must be incorporated in all stages of a value chain to achieve a fully circular economy: from design to production and all the way to the consumer. The Commission action plan sets down seven key areas essential to achieving a circular economy: plastics; textiles; e-waste; food, water and nutrients; packaging; batteries and vehicles; buildings and construction.

Plastics

MEPs back the [European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy](#), which would phase out the use of [microplastics](#).

Read more about the [EU strategy to reduce plastic waste](#).

Textiles

[Textiles](#) use a lot of raw materials and water, with less than 1% recycled. MEPs want new measures against microfiber loss and stricter standards on

water use.

Discover [how the textile production and waste affects the environment](#).

Electronics and ICT

Electronic and electrical waste, or e-waste, is the fastest growing waste stream in the EU and [less than 40% is recycled](#). MEPs want the EU to promote longer product life through reusability and reparability.

Learn some [E-waste facts and figures](#).

Food, water and nutrients

An estimated 20% of food is lost or wasted in the EU. MEPs urge the halving of food waste by 2030 under the [Farm to Fork Strategy](#).

Packaging

Packaging waste in Europe reached a record high in 2017. New rules aim to ensure that all packaging on the EU market is economically reusable or recyclable by 2030.

Batteries and vehicles

MEPs are looking at proposals requiring the production and materials of all [batteries](#) on the EU market to have a low carbon footprint and respect human rights, social and ecological standards.

Construction and buildings

Construction accounts for [more than 35% of total EU waste](#). MEPs want to increase the lifespan of buildings, set reduction targets for the carbon footprint of materials and establish minimum requirements on resource and energy efficiency.

Waste management and shipment

The EU generates more than 2.5 billion tonnes of waste a year, mainly from households. MEPs urge EU countries to increase high-quality recycling, move away from landfilling and minimise incineration.

Find out [about landfilling and recycling statistics in the EU](#).

[Press release – COVID-19: debate on developing countries' access to vaccines](#)



Date: Thursday, 4 February, 9:30-10:30

Venue: ANTALL 4Q2 and via [live webstreaming](#)

MEPs are expected to urge the Commission to help make vaccines available to developing countries and will be asked to explain how this can be achieved.

Background

In an [upcoming draft report](#), the committee is set to ask for substantial new funds to assist developing countries worldwide in their fight against COVID-19, including by making vaccines available globally. Last spring, Development Committee Chair [Tomas Tobé](#) (EPP, SE) [called for such action](#), and the committee urged the international community to [protect the most vulnerable](#).

In a debate in November 2020, the GAVI vaccine alliance told the committee they planned to deliver [two billion doses of safe, effective COVID-19 vaccines](#) by 2021.

COVID-19: Council updates recommendation on travel restrictions from third countries into the EU



The Council today adopted a recommendation amending the recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction.

Criteria to lift restrictions

Under the new rules, the following epidemiological criteria should be taken into account to determine the countries for which the restriction on non essential travel should be lifted:

- not more than 25 new COVID-19 cases per 100 000 inhabitants over the last 14 days
- a stable or decreasing trend of new cases over this period in comparison to the previous 14 days
- more than 300 tests per 100 000 inhabitants in the previous 7 days, if the data is available to ECDC
- not more than 4% positive tests among all COVID-19 tests carried out in the previous 7 days, if the data is available to ECDC
- the nature of the virus present in a country, in particular whether variants of concern of the virus have been detected

In addition, the overall response to COVID-19 may be taken into account, in particular available information on aspects such as surveillance, contact tracing, containment, treatment and reporting as well as the reliability of available information and data sources and, if needed, the total average score across all dimensions for International Health Regulations (IHR).

Reciprocity should continue to be taken into account on a case by case basis.

Reintroduction of restrictions

Where the epidemiological situation worsens quickly and, in particular, where a high incidence of variants of concern of the virus is detected, travel restrictions for non-essential travel may be rapidly reintroduced. In the same circumstances, member states may also limit temporarily the categories of essential travellers. Travel justified by compelling reasons should still remain possible.

Measures for travellers

Member states should require persons travelling for any essential or non-essential reason, with the exception of transport and frontier workers, to

have a negative PCR test taken at the earliest 72 hours before departure.

In addition, they may require self-isolation, quarantine and contact tracing for a period of up to 14 days, as well as further COVID-19 testing as needed during the same period. Quarantine and additional testing upon or after arrival should be imposed in particular to those travellers arriving from a third country where a variant of concern of the virus has been detected.

As regards essential travel, member states may decide, in a coordinated way, to waive some of the above measures in those cases where they would impede the very purpose of the travel. For transport personnel, seafarers and frontier workers, member states should not require more than a negative rapid antigen test on arrival. For transport personnel coming from a country where a high incidence of variants of concern is detected, member states may require a negative rapid antigen tests before departure.

Background information

On 16 March 2020, the Commission adopted a communication recommending a temporary restriction of all non-essential travel from third countries into the EU for one month, which was further extended on 8 April, 8 May and 11 June.

On 30 June 2020, the Council adopted a recommendation on the gradual lifting of the temporary restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU. Travel restrictions should be lifted for countries listed in the recommendation, with this list being reviewed and, as the case may be, updated every two weeks.

On 25 January 2021 the European Commission proposed amendments to this recommendation, following the EU leaders videoconference of 21 January. The amendments are a coordinated response to the rise of infections and the risks posed by the more transmissible new variants of the virus within and outside the EU. They follow the recommendation by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) to avoid non-essential travel, in order to slow down the importation and spread of the new variants of concern.

The Council recommendation is not a legally binding instrument. The authorities of the member states remain responsible for implementing its content.

Article – EU-Russia relations under strain: what are the causes?



EU-Russia relations have become increasingly strained over the past decade, not least because of [the country's 2014 annexation of Crimea](#). The Kremlin's support for separatists in eastern Ukraine and [Russia's military intervention in Syria](#) have only exacerbated matters. Another source of tension is Russia's [disinformation campaigns](#) and cyber-attacks, as well as attempts to interfere in Western democratic processes.

Arrest of Alexei Navalny

Having recovered from a [near-fatal poisoning](#) last year, opposition leader Navalny was detained on his return to Russia on 17 January. Speaking during a [Facebook live interview](#) on 27 January 2021, [Urmaz Paet](#), the vice-chair of Parliament's foreign affairs committee, called for sanctions against "those who have direct responsibility for the arrest and harassment of Alexei Navalny".

In [a resolution adopted four days following the arrest](#), Parliament called for significantly tighter EU sanctions against Russia, as well as for the immediate and unconditional release of Navalny and of all those detained in relation to his return to Moscow. As well as sanctions against President Vladimir Putin's inner circle and Russian media propagandists, MEPs said that measures could also be taken under the [EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime](#). Paet described the new mechanism as an "absolutely appropriate" tool and added: "It is impossible for free European societies not to react to harsh violations of human rights."

EU sanctions against Russia

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, EU [economic sanctions](#) target Russia's financial, defence and energy sectors. Russia has responded with counter-sanctions, banning around half of its agri-food imports from the bloc. Before Christmas, EU leaders unanimously decided to extend the sanctions until 31 July 2021. The measures, which are renewed twice a year, [have hit Russia hard](#): by late 2018, its economy was thought to be 6% smaller due to EU and US sanctions.

The EU also imposed [sanctions on Russian officials](#) in response to Navalny's poisoning. In the 27 January interview, Paet listed recent "sad examples" of Russian foreign policy and said: "If a country is not following basic human rights and international law, there's no other option for EU nations."

Echoes of Belarus

Speaking in the same interview, [Andrius Kubilius](#), one of Parliament's lead MEPs on Russia, described sanctions as an "effective" tool. Kubilius said that tens of thousands of Russians had braved beatings, arrests and temperatures of -50° to protest the arrest of Navalny. He also spoke of the echoes of [Belarus](#) in recent developments inside Russia: "Lukashenko tried to steal the Belarusian presidential election and it is very clear that the Kremlin regime is trying to steal the Duma elections. We need to punish such behaviour."

He added: "We can make a very simple conclusion: democracy is very important for the Russian people and Alexei Navalny who is fighting for those rights is doing a hero's job. That is why we are condemning the Kremlin's autocratic behaviour."

Nord Stream 2

Another aspect of EU-Russia relations is energy. Controversy over the new [Nord Stream 2 pipeline](#) has highlighted the country's leverage as the Union's main energy supplier. In the 21 January resolution, MEPs called on the EU to immediately stop work on the controversial pipeline, which would link Germany directly to Russia. Paet expressed his hope that EU ministers would take Parliament's position seriously and said that the Nord Stream 2 project "violates the EU's common energy security policy".

No longer a "strategic partner"

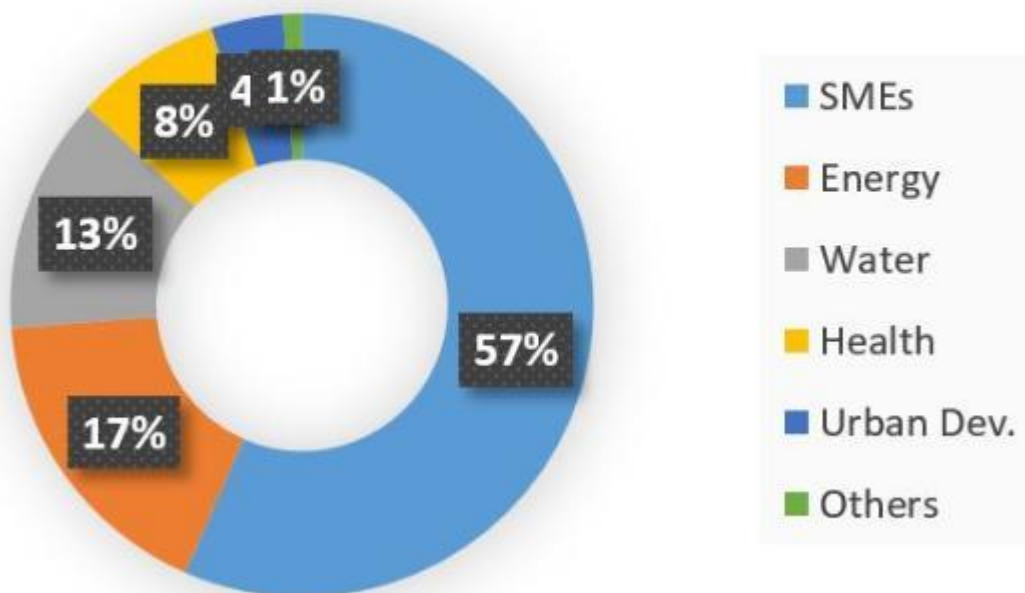
In March 2019, [a European Parliament resolution](#) stated that Russia could no longer be considered a "strategic partner". However, despite the tensions, there are many areas where both the EU and Russia have common interests and concerns. For instance, Russia played a constructive role in negotiations on the [Iran nuclear deal](#), both the EU and Russia advocate a two-state solution

to the [Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#) and both are signatories of the [Paris climate agreement](#). The EU is still by far Moscow's biggest trade and investment partner (accounting for 42% of Russian exports in 2019).

Paet noted that Russia is a European country and Parliament wants to see that Russians have all the freedoms enjoyed in the EU. He stressed however that "real changes can ultimately only come from inside, not from the outside". Kubilius added, "We are in solidarity with ordinary Russian people" and that while "Russia has left the road of democratic development, it can come back".

[Recordjaar voor financiering EIB Groep in Nederland – €3,18 miljard geïnvesteerd](#)

EIB Groep in 2020 (per sector)



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"In 2020 lieten we zien dat investeren in economisch herstel niet ten koste hoeft te gaan van steun aan klimaatactie en innovatie. Al onze doelstellingen hangen met elkaar samen. Europa kan alleen sterker uit deze crisis komen door te investeren in de groene en digitale economie van de toekomst, niet in de structuren uit het verleden. Daarbij moeten we er wel voor zorgen dat geen enkele regio in Europa achterblijft en moeten we samenwerken met onze

partners buiten de EU", zei EIB-president Werner Hoyer

Dat de financiering van de EIB Groep in Nederland een recordhoogte bereikte, was mede te danken aan de inspanningen van het EIF, dat zo'n €1,3 miljard beschikbaar maakte. Middels steun voor microfinanciering met Qredits, equity-investeringen in 13 fondsen, en garanties aan onder meer ABN Amro en Aegon, werd Nederland één van de belangrijkste landen voor EIF-investeringen in 2020. Ook een samenwerking met Invest-NL om samen het "[Dutch Future Fund](#)" op te zetten was hierbij een belangrijke ontwikkeling.

De EIB zelf maakte iets meer dan [€2 miljard beschikbaar](#) voor projecten in de energie- en watersector, de zorg, en het MKB. Met 34% van alle EIB-investeringen werd het belang van klimaat onderstreept, zo kreeg HVC een lening voor de [uitbreiding van haar warmtenetten](#) en tekende [waterbedrijf Vitens](#) een lening voor het toekomst- en klimaatbestendig maken van haar waternetwerk. Door een contra-garantieconstructie tussen EIB en EIF, ter ondersteuning van een grote MKB-faciliteit met ING Bank, komt het totale investeringsniveau in Nederland afgelopen jaar uit op € 3,18 miljard^[1].

De recent toegetreden vicepresident voor de Benelux, de Belg Kris Peeters, stelde: *"Het is een duidelijk signaal dat de EIB Groep samen met de lidstaten de maatschappelijke uitdagingen van vandaag aan gaat. Behalve de steunmaatregelen om de economische gevolgen van de corona-uitbraak in te dammen, die in het investeringsvolume van het EIF in Nederland extra sterk tot uiting komen, staat de EIB Groep er als het aankomt op klimaatinvesteringen, iets dat we in de komende jaren ook in Nederland zeker verder zullen uitbouwen."*

^[1] Volume EIB en EIF is opgeteld € 3,3 mld, maar aangezien de ING-operatie een contragarantie-structuur tussen EIB en EIF betreft, komt het, om dubbeltelling te voorkomen, uit op € 3,179 mld.